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Jennifer Foster

"Can Positive Group Experiences Shift Attitudes Toward Group Work?"

Monday, May 21, 2007

Noon

Mershon Center for International Security Studies
1501 Neil Ave., Columbus, OH 43201

See a [streaming video](#) of this event. This streaming video requires RealPlayer. If you do not have RealPlayer, you can [download it free](#).

Jennifer "Gigi" Foster is a Senior Lecturer in Applied Microeconomics and Econometrics in the School of Commerce, Division of Business, at the University of South Australia. Her areas of research include social effects in education, health, and the workplace; human sorting processes; labor and health economics; and applied microeconomics.

Foster's published papers include "It's Not your Peers, and It's Not your Friends: Some progress toward understanding the educational peer effect mechanism" (*Journal of Public Economics*, 2006), and "Making Friends: A nonexperimental analysis of social pair formation" (*Human Relations*, 2005).

Foster will speak on her working paper, "Can Positive Group Experiences Shift Attitudes Toward Group Work? New evidence from a diverse undergraduate setting." In this paper, Foster uses a new data set on university undergraduates working in study groups first to estimate the influence on actual group performance of prior attitudes toward group work, and then to determine the residual effect of prior attitudes on group members' post-evaluation of their work. Results illuminate the extent to which young adults' prior attitudes about working in groups are malleable over the course of one semester.

Other works in progress include "Estimating Spillovers in the Classroom with Panel Data" (with Peter Arcidiacono, Natalie Goodpaster and Josh Kinsler), "Do Students Want to Succeed? Peer group choice, social influence, and undergraduate performance," and "Names Will Never Hurt Me: Racially identifiable names and identity in the undergraduate classroom."



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Paper Abstract

Individuals often work in groups. Group members' private attitudes about working in groups, whether or not they reflect reality, may prejudice their group performance. Once actual group performance is observed, the extent to which attitudes fail to adjust to match this performance might be seen by an economist as the staying power of wrong thinking.

In this paper, a new data set on university undergraduates working in study groups is used to determine the residual effect of prior attitudes on individuals' *ex post* evaluation of group work, conditional on actual group performance. Student differences in academic, demographic, and preference dimensions are captured using both survey and administrative data at the start of the course, and attitude trajectories are estimated conditional on these differences.

Results show that young adults' prior attitudes about working in groups are strikingly unresponsive both to their own academic achievement while working in groups, and to their group mates' achievement. While socially or psychologically rewarding group-work experiences may be effective in teaching first-year students the benefits of cooperation, parallel lessons are unlikely to be drawn from first-hand experiences that groups can yield objective benefits in terms of individual or group achievement.

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